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Stanton Surrenders Material For Ray's Evidentiary Hearing

A preliminary hearing in the James Earl Ray case yesterday paved the way for Ray's evidentiary hearing to begin as scheduled at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday.

At yesterday's hearing, Shelby County Atty. Gen. Hugh Stanton Jr. gave Ray's attorneys all files which had been sought from his office in pretrial discovery motions.

The files, including letters, photographs and "various physical evidence" related to the Ray case, was supplemented by documents retrieved from the home of former Atty. Gen. Phil M. Canale Jr.

Canale said later that as attorney general he kept "a miscellaneous file of unofficial letters" in the Ray case, and took them home as "souvenirs" when he retired last year.

Ray's attorneys had asked for all relevant documents in the case, and told U.S. Dist. Judge Robert M. McRae Jr. last Wednesday that Stanton was withholding certain files or letters.

They asked that he be held in contempt of court, but Stanton told McRae yesterday, "I was not at all familiar with the tremendous volume of files we had on James Earl Ray." He said his chief investigator, John Carlisle, had found "five more files with hundreds of letters and various physical evidence" which had been overlooked in an earlier search.

Also yesterday, McRae ordered Ray's attorneys to make available to the state any "documents or letters in which James Earl Ray discussed his guilty plea" to the 1968 slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Asst. State Atty. Gen. Henry Haile had asked for those documents "to see whether Ray indicated in his letters any willingness to plead guilty to the slaying."

Ray claims he was coerced into pleading guilty by his former attorneys and Alabama author William Bradford Huie. The evidentiary hearing, which will consider that claim, will decide whether Ray is entitled to withdraw the guilty plea and stand trial for the slaying.

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